

1-1-2008

# The Gender of Madrasa Teaching

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## Recommended Citation

Kumar, Nita. "The Gender of Madrasa Teaching." *Madrasas in South Asia: Teaching Terror?*, Ed. Jamal Malik. New York: Routledge, 2008. 113-124.

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## THE GENDER OF MADRASA TEACHING

*Nita Kumar<sup>1</sup>*

There are thousands of Muslim children, both girls and boys, going to madrasas in all the cities of South Asia (Sikand 2005: 313–14). Zeenat and Shahzad, a weaver's daughter and a weaver's son in the city of Varanasi, North India, the centre of silk weaving, are two such children. All adult Muslims, such as all the adult male and female members of Zeenat and Shahzad's families, explicitly articulate and perform gender identities. Can we make a useful co-relation between the gender identities of the adults and the experience of the madrasa?

It is easy to distinguish a madrasa-educated man or woman from an uneducated one, and in the population of an artisanal working-class city like Varanasi, both exist. The most readily apparent differences between the two are that, like all schooled adults, the madrasa-taught man or woman is more self-aware of him/herself in appearance and speech, more coherent in articulation and presentation, and more precise about his or her identity as sectarian Muslim, national Muslim, and universal Muslim. At a wider, national level, a lack of difference between a madrasa-educated and an uneducated person does appear, in that both would typically look poor and provincial, and would present themselves as different from the mainstream of Indian formal education. An important line of difference in a city's population is, therefore, based entirely on the fact of madrasa schooling.

Insofar that a madrasa is a *school*, there is, and always has been, a partly deliberate and partly unreflective hidden curriculum of gender socialization (Minault 1998). Yet, we must be sensitive to the actual territory occupied by the madrasa within the madrasa-goer's total learning experience. In the excerpts I discuss from the ethnography of children in Varanasi, I problematize what children, particularly girls, are learning, and if their madrasa teaching produces gender differences in the children. My chapter is in three parts. First, I look in detail at the case of a student of a girls' madrasa, Zeenat, as also being taught or trained into an identity and life course at home. It seems striking that her home socialization and education — the home as “madrasa or school” — is more power-

ful than her education in her formal madrasa. Second, I look at the case of Shahzad and find that the same pattern holds true for boys. All non-elite children, and non-elite children are the only ones who go to the madrasa, experience a home "school" that is more formative than the school outside. We may conclude therefore that madrasas for girls are not different in structure or pedagogy to madrasas for boys, and the experience for girl students falls into the same patterns as for boys. Third, I look at a progressive and modern madrasa that is in fact a madrasa only in name and by virtue of including Qur'anic studies. This madrasa might produce some more liberal Muslims, but it could hypothetically do so for girls as well as for boys.

Finally, we must ask: what then is the significance of the difference between men and women in the Islamic society of South Asia? That is the question I attempt to answer at the end of the chapter.

### I: Zeenat at school and at home

In class 3 of the madrasa Jamia Hamidiyya Rizwiyya for girls in Varanasi, India, the teacher puts some questions and answers on the blackboard and goes into a kind of doze. The children occupy themselves with playing, gossiping, exchanging objects. A few girls in front play with ink and write something playfully. I pick Zeenat because she seems to be a good student. She looks very solemn, has fine handwriting and aesthetic sense, writing all the questions in green and the answers in blue. I go home with her after school.

As with most of the children, her home is just across the road in the weaving mohalla of Madanpura. The building is of a familiar house design. We climb up four floors with an opening in the middle around a courtyard and rooms all around. The cooking is done on the landing. Women and children gather to stare at Zeenat's guest. Zeenat's family lives in one room, about ten feet square. There is no furniture in the room. A mat is spread out for us. Zeenat's mother and father sit against one wall; two of the children sit near them; two others wander around and do their own things. The baby plays nearby.

Zeenat is the middle of five children. Her older brother and sister do not study. Wasim, the brother, is already a weaver and Shahina, the sister, does housework full-time. Their parents voice the discourse of education that is the discourse of all the parents of Varanasi. It states that there are two kinds of people in the world: those who do and those who do not have the *zehen* or mind to study. The oldest boy, Wasim Riaz, and the girl, Shahina Parveen, had both dropped out of school early because they did not have the inclination for studies. Wasim has the inclination for weaving and housework comes naturally to Shahina. Zeenat and her brother Mukhtar go to madrasas, and the youngest, Shagufla, only two years old, has the makings of the best scholar of them all -- she grabs any paper or books she can find.

Zeenat's mother is educated, and moreover like all the women of her class does all the stitching for the family herself. Zeenat is learning stitching from her

mother, not in the academic year but during the holidays, as her sister had learnt before her.

The older four siblings have all either completed their Qur'an courses or are now completing them. Qur'an courses are held in the house of their *bari Amma*, or senior mother, grandmother, or aunt, with at least twenty girls gathered under a *maulani* (a female Arabic teacher). Classes take two hours a day, from 2.30 to 4.30 or 5.00. There are no charges, but there is a gift given on graduation, and sweets at other occasions, and when the student gets married, a set of clothes. An *ustad*, that is, a teacher, is to be honoured next only to the parents. I go to the Qur'an class for girls and am impressed by the fact that religious teaching is no different at this particular level for boys or for girls.

Arabic is taught to girls in that part of the neighbourhood by Salmia Sultana, the wife of a *maulana*. I ask her directly how the keeping of *roza* (the fast during the month of Ramadan) is taught to children and how it is good for them. She says,

They *can keep* it from the age of ten onwards. This girl [pointing at one] is good at keeping rozas. Sometimes children keep a roza for part of the day, and then again for a longer part. Thus they get into the habit. They develop the *shauk* (passion). *Nahin to zabardasti karri parti hai* (or else we have to use force).

What is its usefulness? "*Sabar sikhte hain* (They learn patience, that is, self-denial)." If they learn this from the age of ten onwards, what is the procedure before that? How do they learn anything? Before that, she told me, they are small. "*Samajh nahin hoti* (they don't have sense (understanding). Those who have sense are told. Suppose I am reading the namaz and he comes there, I could simply tell him, and if he understands, that's fine. Otherwise I would scold him to teach him."

Since teachers in other madrasas had not been as articulate, I probe the meanings of "understanding" further. She suggests that it is a faculty that belongs to maturity. Then she asks me, a little frustrated by my questions, "Do you all explain everything to babies?" A good question, and I replied at some length how there was a modern point of view according to which you did indeed explain everything to very small children. She nodded absently. It did not make much sense – even to me as I described it.

She supervises simultaneously four girls doing sari trimming and four girls studying the Qur'an. Rubina reads the Qur'an in an impressive musical style, asking the meaning of some difficult words. She will memorize it in this lesson and let the teacher hear three verses after learning it. Another child reads in a different musical style. Rubina has been learning since she was small, and is almost ten years old now. She will finish in about two years. She goes to a madrasa alongside. Salmia Sultana tells me that girls do not become *hafiz*, or those who know the whole Qur'an by heart. There is no ban on it; they just do

not. But boys study less of Qur'an than do girls, and fewer boys do. They get busy with their work.

All the children as well as the teachers are swaying to and fro. In answer to my question, do they understand the meaning? The answer is no. When they grow up, they can inform themselves of the translation in Urdu, if they like. Right now, there is no time; they have to study other things too. They laugh when I suggest that by not understanding the meaning of the Qur'an they are doing only half the work.

As one girl is put in charge of another to study, the former complains of the latter to "dadi", their fictive kin-name of grandmother for the teacher. All the voices rise together in a thick, harmonious hum of Qur'an reading. A young daughter-in-law is teased about being called by her natal home while her in-laws conspire to keep her two more days. When I ask them tentatively, they do not know any facts in Indian history including who Babur was and when India became independent.

Watching Zeenat in her madrasa classroom I had imagined that a good young student like her would study hard and maybe achieve something like the women teachers in her own madrasa, or more advanced teachers of Arabic and Urdu. There were teachers I had interviewed earlier who continued teaching after marriage and after having young sons. But upon seeing Zeenat's family, I realized that the little girl's seriousness at school was illusory. Whatever she ever did, she would do very well. What she did now was schoolwork; what she would do later was housework and child rearing. All the time she was learning as conscientiously at home as she did in school. In school, she was learning the reading and writing of three languages, and some other subjects, mostly by rote. At home, she was learning cooking, sewing, keeping baby, serving, tidying up, running errands, all the details of how a home works and what in that particular culture and community a homemaker should do. She was finishing the Qur'an and, because that was in a home setting, there was other intangible teaching that went along with it that she was imbibing.

Indeed, there was a socialization taking place in the home that I would not ever be able to directly observe but that I could, based on my observations, hypothesize about. Zeenat, like all children, wakes up to the sound of her parents. Gender socialization begins at that point, because the mother is typically sweeping the floor, filling water, doing the dishes, and soon lighting the fire for the first meal. The father is either still asleep, or grooming himself and preparing for the day, typically with a cup of tea, or a leisurely toilet. *In no case* is the father the person who is totally, and irrefutably, responsible for the morning meal and the children getting fed and sent off to school with their tiffin boxes. The mechanisms of all this are clear enough to the child, and the gender socialization is powerful.

By contrast the class socialization is much weaker because, unlike with gender where both the parents are simultaneously present to compare, there is no other model before the child except that of the home she is born into. Those

whom she visits are other members of the family or close friends, and are typically of the same class. Only the outsider processes spaces, processes, etc. as limited or characteristic of a certain lifestyle. For the child they are normality itself and she finds them not remarkable in the least. A girl does not consciously think that the woman's situation could be compared to the man's and any constructive ideas generated from the comparison. The constructive ideas, rather, are in the lessons learned from watching the parent of the child's own sex.

For instance, there is the lesson regarding the use of space. The child awakes from a bed that has been made strictly for the night. It is not a permanent bed that will remain a bed throughout the day. She is typically pressed to get up and out of the way so that the space can be made available. Not only does she get into the habit of not sleeping late, she is told directly that she must help in clearing up the space.

Zeenat is learning how to deploy herself in the one room her family lives in, to share the bathroom on the landing with the extended family, to cook with her mother, and gradually by herself, in the space outside their door, to clean up each time and leave the space unmarked, and otherwise practice a total non-specialization of domestic spaces. The room and its outside are swept morning and evening or when littered, whichever comes first. All materials are put away after use. No space is named after its function, as the place "for" some particular activity, including sleeping. The room becomes, in turn, a bedroom, a dining room, a sitting room, a family room, a study, a workplace, a dining room again, and again a bedroom. Zeenat is mastering the discourse perfectly without a word being spoken on the subject. She is learning further where and how to spread out the rugs for those who would work or sleep, and those who visit. She is learning how every niche and cranny of the room has its uses.

Even when it is not the question of space that makes the child get up early, it is school. Schools begin at 7.00 or 7.30 and children must be up between 5.00 and 6.00. Few take a bath that early, unless in the height of summer. Baths are considered more leisurely than the fast-paced morning hours permit, mostly because of the shortage of space, but also because of the cultural notion that a bath is pleasurable and to be savoured slowly. Bathing places are not specialized, just as other spaces – certain workplaces excepted – are not. The tap or the bucket brought in for bathing, as it often is, is not in a closed space. Men and women bathe routinely in courtyards, with some items of clothing on. A small child could one day be bathed on the roof and another day in the corner of a room. As the child grows, she learns to make her decision to bathe based on several factors.

The night spaces get messy and are slowly transformed. A thorough sweeping is done of all the floors, by the mother or an elder sister, never by the father. Sheets and blankets are folded up and stacked away. Mattresses and *chatais* are rolled up and put away. The floor everywhere is made clean enough to sit and eat at. Nowhere do people wear shoes in the house or living areas. All visitors are always made welcome. The males work downstairs and in specialized

rooms. They are like visitors during the daytime as they come in to eat and rest. All children take for granted that the mother should provide all the services at home, as well as be around the whole day like an anchor for the various vessels to come back to and tie themselves up temporarily.

Zeena is, as a child, perfectly comfortable and natural, and will grow up into an adult in that way (Abu-Lughod 1993). She is and will be, "well-adjusted", and depending on how she can adjust to the family she will marry into, she will be happy. And she will be thus well adjusted and happy because of the success of her education, that is, the education in her home. Her education in her madrasa is destined to pass like a happy dream. It occupies several hours every day but is, by all understanding, minimal. It consists, as described earlier, of the teacher putting up some basic questions and answers on the blackboard on a succession of subjects, and the children playing around while copying them. There are never any real questions asked or answers formulated, and emotional energy or thought is considered a waste on such interactions.

## II: the case of Shahzad

I want to turn next to the story of Shahzad, a ten-year-old who studies in a boys' madrasa in class IV. I met him on the road and talked to him in his home, together with his mother and sister. Like the girls in the Qur'an class that I put history questions to, Shahzad is unable to answer a *single* question I ask him on Indian history, including on the Slave Dynasty, on Babur, and on India's independence. His mother explains that he is not learning well and that she would like to change madrasas, though this was the same one that she had studied in herself and now it had deteriorated. Shahzad is learning several other things, however. He is learning how to weave and in a few years will become a fully-fledged weaver. He is learning how "to be" a weaver, that is a man of the streets, someone who labours hard, but cherishes his freedom which he uses for *ghumna-phirna*, or wandering around. He is also learning the history of his community of Ansaris, of where weavers came from, what kind of Muslims his particular group comprises, how the year is marked by certain events and celebrations, and the space of the city is marked by fairs, processions, neighbourhoods, and shrines.

Shahzad's madrasa was founded 107 years ago by an association called Anjuman Taraqqi Ahi-i Sunnat. The founding of this and other madrasas, large and small, are part of the educational history of colonialism (Metcalf 1982). The Educational Dispatch of Sir Charles Wood of 1854 was injurious to all the crafts and industries of India (Nurullah and Naik 1951, 1964; Zastoupil and Moir 1999). Weavers, together with many other communities, failed to "take advantage" of the new government schemes of grants-in-aid. They turned their backs on the modern colonial schools partly for vocational reasons. Those who chose to study within the British system did so for professional or vocational reasons, but the weavers already had a profession. They also resisted them for ethical

reasons. The new schools were inadequate because they did not provide any character formation. So, together with other castes and communities, the Ansaris of Banaras founded their own institutions in which they hoped and believed a synthesis between the *dini* or moral, and the *dunyawi* or worldly, could be made. While doing so they worked along denominational lines: the Deobandis, Barelwis, and Ahl-i Hadith all set up separate madrasas in which they hired teachers and used textbooks according to their sectarian preferences (Kumar 2000). So Shahzad is not only a weaver, an Ansari, a Banarasi, and a resident of Madanpura, all of which he would identify with if asked "Who are you?" he is also a Muslim and a Barelwi.

Shahzad does not know what happened in 1947. He cannot remember any episode or personality from Indian history. More than that, he cannot improvise or invent anything, as does a child in a moderately good school who has some training in answering questions from textbooks. So I turn to his teacher, master Mansoor to ask about the problem of poor teaching in the madrasa. Mansoor Alam Khan's responses are very significant.

Those who are in the sari business do not want their children to get ahead. There are obstacles from the guardians. About 40 per cent of them work at the loom plus studying. They cannot pay enough attention to their subjects. Children drop out after class V because they have finished the Qur'an Sharif. This place has no society, no culture.

Master Mansoor's complaint that "the guardians don't take enough responsibility" is echoed and re-echoed by every teacher in every school where the surrounding population is largely uneducated. My interpretation of this negative assessment of guardians by educators is the following.

In colonial times, the fact that modern schooling was introduced in a climate of mutual hostility and even violence between the public and the state produced a family-school relationship of conflict. The British maintained that the school's job was to reform the backward public and it praised those who took up the new colonial schooling. Those who remained indifferent to it had their own excellent reasons for doing so, as have already been mentioned. However, a mutual suspicion was created between the school and its teachers as reformers on the one hand, and the family as backward and rooted in its local culture on the other hand. This relationship of mutual suspicion has continued into contemporary times. The colonial state's role has been taken over by the nationalist state. Today, modernity is the privilege only of those families who cooperate with the nationalist schools. The corollary of this cooperation is the neglect of local culture and histories, often also of ethics. While Shahzad does not know what happened in 1947, what is important is that he does know and is learning many other things, such as the craft of weaving, the ethics of being a well adjusted member of his society, and the pleasures of a certain free lifestyle that includes a lot of *ghumna phirna* (wandering around), chewing and spitting



pan everywhere, and sitting on benches at outdoor tea shops socializing and drinking tea.

The dilemma is this. Either Shahzad will be a good weaver, or he will be a well-educated person. His madrasa has already made the choice for him. The madrasas for weavers are such that they produce good weavers, people who are satisfied with their jobs and remain tied to them forever. The madrasas fit their students for certain roles. The roles are quintessentially male, lower class, and non-modern. They are justified and rendered attractive by a nice conflation of "male" and "free" -- the "free" deriving from the non-modern -- and the lower class, while never quite forgotten, is not fore-fronted. Shahzad's freedom should certainly be greater than to wander in whichever *gali* he likes and spit pan wherever he likes. As a child going to school in a modern democratic state, he should have an education that would give him the freedom to choose his future. The choice seems to be between two kinds of freedom, and equally between two kinds of discipline. The discipline Shahzad is subjected to at present is only that of memorizing the Qur'an, learning his weaving, and practising some daily ethical-cultural codes. Weighty as this seems in description, it is actually quite easy. A different education would subject him to far more severe disciplining, including that of rigorous homework, examinations, and then presentation of the self.

There is no question that a different kind of schooling would open more doors for Shahzad, even as it would close others related to his religious and community identity. But maybe the two choices are more evenly balanced than we acknowledge. The community, in providing the madrasas it does for its children in its quite legitimate wish to protect its values and ethics, is one political actor. The state, and the modern schools based on its model, are another set of political actors. As we shall see below, they are doing a similar thing, that is, they are not fore-fronting the interests of the child but of an imagined modernity (Kumar 2007).

### III: the progressive madrasa

In order to understand this business of the "interest of the child" I want to turn to my third story, that of Sabina in class I. This is in a modern institution that I would call a school, but that its administrators call a madrasa for girls, Umahutullah Ulum. The teacher in the English class has written three sentences on the board:

Q. What do you read?

Q. What does she read?

Q. Do we read the Qur'an everyday?

The teacher is revising for an exam and asks the children to write the questions and the answers in their copies and then walks around the room to check them. I

am sitting at the back, a boy on my left, a girl on my right. The teacher sounds exhausted very quickly: "Ai-ee-ee!" she cries out, though all teachers try to minimize their shouting when an observer is present. "I am telling you! Write one question and one answer, one question and one answer." What the children were doing is to write question two as the answer to question one, and so on. They had no idea what the teacher's questions meant. They had no idea what the teacher meant by "questions" or, as she had written on the blackboard, "Q". They could not read the adult pattern in her brain regarding the necessary sequence of questions and answers.

Unfortunately, for herself, the teacher did not grasp, as she raised her voice louder and louder and raised her hand as well, the gap in understanding between herself and her six- and seven-year-olds. It might have taken her one class period, or maybe just ten minutes, to explain the structure behind the weighty terms "question" and "answer". Why did she not think of this obvious strategy? A lack of training certainly. Ignorance about child development and child psychology. Confusion about appropriate methods for different subjects such as English. The teacher seemed to lack elementary humanity as well. Could she not see the acute discomfort on the face of all the students, almost on the verge of tears? The boy on my left had finished very quickly and was sitting in an attitude of acute misery. He could hardly breathe. He had written:

A 1: Yes, I do read.

A 2: Yes, she does read.

A 3: Yes, I read the Qur'an everyday.

The girl on my right was trying to hide her copy but I could see that she was one of the many who had written down questions as answers. There was only one student in the class who was greeted with silence by the teacher which meant that she had written the answers perfectly. "Perfectly" is to reproduce what they have once written in their classwork copies, then repeated in their homework copies, then memorized, and then, as on this day, be asked to write from memory. In this case the correct or perfect answers were:

A 1: I read the Qur'an.

A 2: She reads the Qur'an.

A 3: Yes, I read the Qur'an everyday.

The bell rang and I wooed the spectacular student. I realized quickly that, apart from being a spoilt child (she had ten rupees to buy snacks for her tiffin), she had a tutor for all the subjects. This madam came every evening and went through all her lessons, in and out, back and forth, until the little girl could answer the kind of questions her teacher might set her. The teacher must know that it is a tutor who makes the perfect reproduction of her teaching possible, but it is not part of her legitimate knowledge. It will not be mentioned by her as part

of any discussion on teaching, learning, children, or current education. She is taking it for granted that out of the thirty or so students in her class the one or two who can get her questions right are the ones who have another teacher at home to drill them. If others cannot write the answers because they cannot understand, that is not the teacher's business.

The whole picture is probably even worse from the point of view of the larger development of the child. Sabina is a "good" student because she is docile, not because she is interested in the work. She has learnt to sit still because the rewards from sitting still — the red tick marks, the successful tests and exams, and the good marks — are greater than the rewards from doing her own thing. Her family is a "good" family because they care enough to get a tutor for their child.

Umahatullab is a modern institution which starts English from class I. The English textbook is called *Al Qalam English reader 1*, specially designed for Islamic madrasas. The first five lessons therefore teach five verbs through actions relating to the Qur'an, masjid, Allah, and the Prophet. Inside the front cover there is a message for teachers explaining that English is a foreign language and that whatever techniques we may develop to make it attractive for students must be found. Not only is this approach fine, it is excellent. The book brings the child's home culture closer to her school culture, or at least the desired home culture.

If the child still cannot respond to the teacher, the fault lies not with the textbook but in what is done with it. The textbook has become a master, not a tool. The teacher expects that the words or exercises of her book will miraculously produce the teaching that she should do. But words in a foreign language are only random sounds. For a child to grasp "I read", "she reads", etc. there must be an incorporation of the new sounds to the acts and practices she knows. Why do educators in India not grasp this? Is there a direct co-relation between economic underdevelopment and pedagogic underdevelopment?

I submit that there is a direct co-relation between pedagogic underdevelopment and colonialism. Colonialism has produced a separation between what is "ours" no matter how injurious to us and what is "foreign" such as supposedly many philosophies and practices associated with modernity. This also correlates to the foreign as abstract and theoretical, and the indigenous as practical. So, were someone to suggest new teaching methods, the response would be an agreement followed by rejection. Yes, of course, there are many nice tricks in teaching, we all know that. But we also know that classrooms cannot be run like that. *In Bangras. In India*. How could one handle a class of say fifty or sixty students, how could one manage in the little time, where would one get the artifacts? I am calling this a failure based on colonialism. The original ideas of modern schooling — building, furniture, fixed curriculum, textbooks, exams, teaching aids — came as foreign ideas. They had originated in a different universe and were rudely introduced into this one. If there had been no colonialism then there would have been either a generic development of new ideas, or a

comfortable translation of the ideas from elsewhere. Now there is only distrust and suspicion, and no will to adapt the "foreign" practices to "our" situations.

### Conclusions

My discussion, based on ethnography in both girls' and boys' madrasas and then in their homes-as-madrasas, reveals the analytical limits of gender. The teaching in the madrasa classroom is ineffective for *both* girls and boys before the more powerful teaching in the home. While the "good" students, such as Zeenat, seem to be totally responsive to the teaching of school teachers, they are in fact "good" all the time, and are even more "good" at home, that is, more responsive to the teaching of the home, where the "teachers", that is the seniors in the family, are more insidious and effective than the school teachers. This seems to be especially true for girls but is not actually a gender divided experience.

This is borne out by the case of Shahzad. His case reveals that the majority of madrasas, and indeed schools, that are trusted by poorer and less-educated parents as the appropriate school for their children, are successful in fulfilling the goals of the community to the neglect of the dreams or desires of the children. The children, like Shahzad, may actually be very interested in being free and mobile and not tied down ineluctably to a profession and a lifestyle. But as the case of weavers' chosen education shows us, weavers have preferred the combination of modernity and local identities that does not threaten their perceived securities and denies children the freedom, as we moderns might perceive it, of social mobility.

The experience of both girls and boys is of an early socialization into gender roles that serves to integrate them into the larger gendered society and dull any possible questioning about identity. Class and gender merge and become mutually supporting here, and each is possible only because of the other. Girls feel secure in their roles because they have, as females, a privileged place in their community. Boys feel secure in their roles because of course they are superior as males and will always be superior within their community.

This prioritization of security over mobility, however, exacts a heavy price *especially* from girls, because even when there may be some experimentation, with a new profession, or simply a new product or market, the woman is posited as the anchor that will hold the man, the family, and the community steadily in place (compare with Chatterjee 1993). The class-based nature of the social reproduction of the Ansaris includes within it this limit of gendered reproduction. It is still important to put class first, because men are as helpless as women in terms of escaping a pre-determined future, and women collaborate as intelligently as men in actively constructing this future instead of waiting passively for processes to unfold.

Finally, the case of Sabina tells us that it is not so easy to formulate a solution. Amartya Sen (2000) might propose that education is development and development is freedom, and has proposed practical steps to provide such educa-

tion/development. So have many institutional founders through the nineteenth century and continue to do so today. They do not comprehend that the solution lies in overcoming the twin legacies of colonialism: one, that of an inadequate infrastructure of pedagogy, and two, of a mental or psychological colonialism that ensures an inability to interpret a solution in a way that permits progress towards its resolution. Such an interpretation would involve regarding children as "individuals", in the best of all possible cases, as potentially beyond class and gender pre-determination.

Altogether, then, the madrasas for both boys and girls are an excellent case in point of the larger problem of schooling in India: the family-home split with the child as an abandoned middle. Both girls and boys are especially abandoned if they are madrasa-goers, and the girl is the more abandoned of the two sexes. The best way to understand "gender in the madrasas" is to understand it as the unnecessary and unfortunate production of young people as "male" and "female" where both male and female identities are based on constraints to mobility.

### Note

- 1 This chapter is based on research carried out between 2002 and 2005. I would like to thank the Indo-Dutch Programme in Alternative Development for funding part of this research. Part of the material has been presented in a different form in Kumar 2007, chapter 2.